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ABSTRACT

The Hispanic-American, because he or she is bilingual and bicultural, could play an important role in the future economic development of the United States. Declines in steel, automotive, and electronics industries due to foreign competition and market saturation have caused industrial displacement and unemployment. The Maquiladora or Twin Plant industry, established by agreement between Mexico and the United States allows U.S. companies to operate plants inside Mexico under certain restrictions, stimulating manufacturing in that country for the U.S. market. While the program has resulted in increased opportunities along the border and has allowed U.S. companies to remain competitive because of lower labor costs, the U.S. government's paternalistic attitude has created dissention rather than understanding, and labor unions have opposed the plants. What is needed is an economic policy based on world interdependence and economic internationalization. Domestic industry is one-dimensional, and businesses should become more internationally oriented. However, higher education is not adequately preparing international businesspeople. Hispanic-Americans, who have some of the flexibility, awareness of cultural differences, and language proficiency needed in the new market, are an important human resource for international trade. Spanish language maintenance and professionalization are needed. (MSE)

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# A LANGUAGE CHALLENGE TO THE HISPANIC AMERICAN

If the increasing globalization in economic activity is perceived as the trend of the future for business, and if the predictions made by John Naisbitt in Megatrends regarding socioeconomic changes hold true, one can expect the following decade to be characterized by an intense competition in international trade. The Hispanic-American, because he or she is bilingual and bicultural, could play an important role in the future economic development of this country. These economic considerations serve as the foundation for the present study.

In order to validate the assumptions made about the future of the world economy, I will first describe the displacement of industries in this country, and the increase of Twin Plants (also known as Maquiladoras) along the border which are replacing the factories being closed in the United States. Secondly, I will analyze the need for a businessperson who would be competent in a foreign language, particularly Spanish, and be able to function in other cultures. Finally, I present the Hispanic-American as that businessperson, who in the process of maintaining the Spanish language and his cultural awareness could answer the future need in international trade. In conclusion, the globalization of the economy seems to present a challenge to the Hispanic-American: to expand the professional usage of the Spanish language from bilingual education and cultural identity to the practical application of international business. This presents a positive influence to the economies of both Latin America and the United States.

A brief analysis of the steel, automotive and electronics industries will help us understand the reasons behind the closing of the plants and factories in the United States. For instance, this country enjoyed a clear advantage in the steel industry during the 1950s and 1960s until Japan challenged this lead by increasing production and reducing its cost. The challenge was so direct and intense that in the early 1980s Japan became the world's largest exporter of steel.

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There are several factors that contributed to the decline of the steel industry in the United States, such as the lack of modernization of the plants and the saturation of the market after World War II; however, the most important factor was the foreign competition from Japan and the underdeveloped countries of Latin America and Asia. The United States accustomed primarily to domestic business and to the dominance of the world market, was not prepared to deal with the new experience of foreign competition. The end result was a lesson to be learned in long-range planning. The consequences of this lesson involved not only loss of revenue in traditional markets, but also an increase in the United States unemployment as plants closed in Pittsburg, Youngstown, etc., due to the loss of the steel industry.

The automotive industry exhibits patterns similar to those that brought the decline of the steel industry, that is, motor vehicle saturation and the influx of imported vehicles from Japan. These familiar forces combined together with the demands of new technology required to control pollution, as well as "restrictions on the operations of motor vehicle firms in NIC makets,"[1] .that is, the Newly Industrialized Countries, resulted in a fierce world competition. However, this time the United States, in an effort to minimize losses and maitain profits, relocated the automotive production/assembly system to Mexico and other Latin American countries. It is important to clarify that these new factories were designed to manufacture parts and assemble cars and not to establish an independent and competitive automotive industry like South Korea and Yugoslavia are attempting to do today. The United States not only remained competitive through this process, but contributed to the formation of what Naisbitt calls "the first globalized industry."[2] As a consequence of this competitive effort, the United States began to recognize the importance of world interdependence in the automotive industry and the further internationalization of the economy.

Through the electronics industry one perceives two different aspects of the economy in the United States: on one hand, the consumer electronics sector (T. V. , radio, etc.) demonstrates the adjustment made in production and other forces related to foreign competition, such as tariffs and protectionism; on the other hand, in the computer industry the United States has still a definite advantage, however, it is unclear how long this country will remain

impervious to the competition from Japan and how this country will meet the future challenge of international trade, particularly when the world market becomes saturated. To focus on this issue, it is helpful to look at the Maquiladora industry and analyze those aspects which have been successful and those that need to be addressed yet.

The Maquiladora program, an In-Bond Assembly, which began in 1965, allows foreigners to operate plants in designated zones in Mexico, most of them close to the border. There are two rules that govern the agreement between Mexico and the United States: the first rule allows a duty-free importation of material and manufactured parts (non-precious metals) to be assembled in Mexico; the second rule requires that the assembled merchandise return to the U. S. for further processing. A duty is paid for the assembling performed in Mexico.

A successful aspect of the Maquiladora has been the partial fulfillment of its primary objectives, which Fulton Freeman, United States Ambassador to Mexico from 1964 to 1969, decribed as a "notable opportunity for providing Mexico with jobs and reducing the incentive for them to enter the United States as wetbacks"[3] The word partial is used here because although the progress is evident in the increase of jobs and opportunities along the border, Mexico's high unemployment rate is yet to be resolved. Further analysis of the statement made by the Ambassador to Mexico reveals one of the most unsuccessful aspects of the border program: a self-centered and paternalistic attitude on the part of the United States that creates dissention rather than an understanding between two countries.

Another perspective is presented by Donald Baerresen, according to this author, "the Border Industrialization Program was divised to stimulate, at least initially, manufacturing in Mexico by the United States for the United States market."[4] The number of factories along the border can be attributed to this important industrialization program. The benefits for the United States from the Maquiladoras meant a considerable reduction in production costs, which in turn allowed the companies in the United States to remain competitive in the automotive and electronic industries. Nevertheless, in spite of these advantages, the industrialization of the border, made possible by the available Mexican labor force, has been met by considerable opposition from labor unions in the United States. This opposition together with the philosophy expressed by

Baerresen in his definition of the border program demonstrate the inadequate concept of foreign competition and international trade of the government of the United States and the business community. This way of thinking could only produce a policy directed primarily by an ideology centered on isolationism and on the limitations of an economy directed to the domestic market.

Therefore, an important task that still needs to be addressed is the formulation of an economic policy based on world interdependence and on the internationalization of the economy. The Maquiladoras not only made both Mexico and the United States aware of the this need, but it also provided them with the opportunity to be integrated into the international economy. The fact that on August 24, 1986, Mexico became the ninety-second contracting party to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the multilateral instrument that lays down agreed rules for international trade confirms this progress.

Nowadays, a businessperson ought to be thinking internationally instead of being limited by the one-dimension tradition of an economy based primarily on the domestic market. The pattern set forth by multinational companies is being followed now by small businesses. Robert L. Jordan, director of public affairs for the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, expresses this trend in the following way:

> The small business community is the backbone of the U.S. economy. In recent years more and more companies have turned their sights toward international markets and certainly this is a favorable time[5].

This same idea is presented by Mick Weltman, director of marketing for Horizon Trading Company, Inc. According to Weltman: "Small businesses can no longer ignore the international market place because it offers numerous opportunities that do not exist in the domestic market."[6] Because of these changes that are taking place in the business community, one can only conclude that a different breed of businessperson is needed to meet the challenges offered by the internationalization of the economy.

But this businessperson is not yet being academically prepared. Universities are lagging behind in the business sector, since graduating students are prepared mainly to conduct business in the

domestic market and are usually not prepared to deal with the realities of international business. In relation to this point, the National Governor's Association, on August 5, 1987, concluded that "business schools should require their students to study the economies of other countries."[7] However, this suggestion will not have a major impact unless the outdated curriculum, which reflects the position of the business community of ten years ago, changes. Retired Dean Steel at U.S.C, states his criticism of the curriculum in the following manner: "If one takes a critical look at the curriculum of business schools, there is evidence the content does not address the crucial issues of the 1980s and 1990s."[8] This assesment leads us to conclude that another major factor for the decreasing international competitiveness described earlier in regards to the American industry, and still present today, is due to the lack of trained business people that can understand production sharing and world interdependence.

Since the globalization trend of the economy that has begun in industry can be regarded as a permanent change, it is important to delineate the type of businessperson needed and the curriculum changes that will prepare him or her for the new challenges. In addition to developing skills related to international trade, such as international business law, international finance, trade restrictions and protectionism, the new businessperson needs to be proficient in a foreign language. Also, he or she must be knowledgeable of cultural differences and be able to function in this new intercultural business environment.

The businessperson prepared with this curriculum will be a flexible individual, able to adjust his or her business behavior and mannerisms to those of the country with which business is being conducted. Being aware of cultural differences will not only maximize efficiency and profits, but it will create an understanding of the interdependence of the world economy. This is what former Secretary of Education William Bennett and the coalition of Corporate, University and congregational leaders had in mind when they proposed that "colleges and Universities must significantly strengthen their international studies courses--languages, cultural, political, economic."[9]

John Naisbitt is more specific when he addresses these linguistic and cultural aspects regarding the globalization of the economy. He states that: "For Americans, it is self-evident that this is the time

to learn another language--and learn it well. The size, proximity, and economic promises of Latin America make Spanish an attractive choice."[10] The choice of the language becomes more relevant when one considers the important role of the Maquiladoras in the internationalization of the economies of Mexico, Latin America and the United States.

It is evident that Hispanic-Americans, in particular Mexican-American, because of their being bilingual and bicultural, have some of the skills that characterize this new businessperson. The important task is to develop them and treat them as the keys to new opportunities.

Bilingual education has played an important role in maintaining the Spanish language and culture, and it is the vehicle that has helped Hispanic Americans maintain and legitimize their cultural identity, and keep in this manner the valuable resource of being bicultural. A positive result stemming from these efforts is their quest for social justice. This term refers not only to the discrimination, but to the struggle of maintiaining the uniqueness of the group through the use of the Spanish language. In essence what Hispanics are seeking is "integration with the Anglo majority"[11] and at the same time, the right to preserve the Spanish language and culture. Ironically, these are precisely the features that need to be developed in the new businessperson.

Academic improvement is another positive outcome of bilingual education. However, the difficulty with academic progress is the price that seems to be required. Instead of dealing with a true bilingual education program, schools, because of federal guidelines restrictions, are concerned with the assimilation process and a short-term outcome: a transitional education centered on shifting languages, from Spanish to English. The instruments used today in bilingual education, including English as a second language, are ultimately contrary to the efforts of preparing for the future human resources needs of this country. It is a regression to convert the bilingual child into a monolingual person.

If one recognizes being bilingual and bicultural as a human resource, then the challenge of bilingual education must include the development of the strengths of the bilingual child. Why spend so much time and resources to produce a monolingual child to later on ask this very same individual, as an adult, to become bilingual and

bicultural? Wouldn't Hispanics, particularly Mexican-Americans, be at a greater disadvantage in this intricate process?

Therefore, the language challenge to the Hispanic-American is to continue the maintenance of the Spanish language and prevent the loss of a valuable resource. The ancestral language must be kept even if it has to be done by studying Spanish as a foreign language. However, maintaining the language is not sufficient. The study of Spanish must transcend the everyday language of the barrio; it must become professional by focusing on the specialized lexicon of the various professions, particularly that related to business.

Through this linguistic process the Hispanic-American will better meet the need of the international businessperson of the future. In this effort, it is important to prevent the devisiveness of contraposing the standard Spanish vs the dialect of various groups. The language must be seen as a continuum, and the dialect as a strength that can be developed to include professional Spanish. Of course, standard Spanish can be expanded towards the dialect. The end result of these efforts would be the formation of a bilingual person who would be able to appreciate the concepts of cultural relativity. Is it not to the advantage of the United States to have individuals who could conduct business with other countries in their native language?

Because of the proposed language challenge to Hispanic-Americans, in particular the Mexican-American, bilingual education should expand its objectives from cultural identity, social justice and academic improvement to include upper mobility through the international business sector. In fact, "if the realities of global existence point to the challenge of today and the opportunity of tomorrow,"[12] so does the potential of Hispanic-Americans. This upper mobility opportunity provides another raison d'etre for bilingual education programs.

The challenge of preparing for international business is more than an enhancing opportunity. It is an obligation. How will the United States remain competitive in the world economy? How will it develop its human resources? Since the Hispanic-American already possesses the language and the culture, he or she should take advantage of these strengths and become the businessperson of the future, who in the process of offering a valuable service to the

United States, would also benefit personally buy moving upward in the socioeconomic ladder.

In conclusion, it is evident that the closing of factories and plants point to a global economy. It is also obvious that the United States was not prepared too meet the challenge of the international market. And although one cannot predict the details and rules of the world economy, one can be certain of its complexity and the need for a businessperson capable of communicating effectively in the native language of other countries. It seems that the Hispanic-American has the opportunity to be that future businessperson if he or she accepts the language challenge, to play in this way a decisive role in the future economic development of the United States and Latin America.

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